Fluor Hanford

News Release

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For Immediate Release

SPENT NUCLEAR FUEL PROJECT REACHES MILESTONE

Richland, WA, January 8, 2003-- Fluor Hanford's Spent Nuclear Fuel Project at the Hanford Site in southeast Washington State passed a critical juncture yesterday when it finished moving more than two million pounds (957 metric tons) of highly radioactive spent nuclear fuel out of the K Basins. In meeting this milestone, the Project moved about 25 million curies of radioactivity – contained in the fuel – away from the shoreline of the Columbia River. Moving this fuel represents one of the most significant risk reduction activities in Hanford's 60-year history.

The spent fuel was moved from underwater storage in the aging K Basins to dry storage in specially designed, vacuum-dried canisters, called multi-canister overpacks (MCOs). The MCOs are being stored in a dry, underground vault miles away from the river until their final disposition in a national repository. This milestone brings the Project to just about the halfway point of removing all the spent fuel (2100 metric tons, more than 4 million pounds) from both basins by 2004.

According to the Tri-Party Agreement (TPA), the legal pact that guides Hanford's cleanup, the fuel was to have been moved by December 31, 2002. Fluor Hanford's Spent Nuclear Fuel Project met the milestone on January 7, 2003.

"The safe achievement of this milestone is the result of super-human efforts by hundreds of workers. Removal of spent nuclear fuel had a very slow start. During the first 18 months, 67 containers of fuel were moved. In the last 7 months or so, that number jumped to 118 containers moved. So removing the first 1/3 of the K West Basin fuel used 3/4 of the schedule. Kudos to so many people who sacrificed so much of their personal time in the long push to come from behind and complete this phase of the project," said Larry Gadbois, K-Basins Project Manager for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

"Our critics said we'd be months or even years behind schedule, but we knew we had to stay the course and let our performance prove them wrong," said DOE Richland Operations Office Manager Keith A. Klein. "Getting to this point has taken the dedication and innovation of a whole lot of people to overcome all that could go wrong and did go wrong."

“Given the technical challenges of this first-of-a-kind project, reaching the milestone within a week of the TPA target date is nothing short of remarkable,” said Keith Thomson, President, and Chief Executive Officer of Fluor Hanford. “It took a lot of innovation and personal sacrifice to overcome the technical challenges the Project faced in the early stages of this multi-faceted task – complicated by the high-risk environment of the K Basins. I congratulate each worker for his or her contribution to bringing Hanford one large step closer to being a risk-free site.”

The 957 metric tons represents the amount of spent nuclear fuel stored in the K West Basin when Fluor Hanford began moving fuel in late 2000. Although the milestone has been met, the K West Basin is not empty, because fuel from the K-East Basin continues to be processed using K West equipment. The fuel is being moved from the K East to the K West Basin using a transfer system conceived and developed by Project employees.

According to Norm Boyter, Fluor Hanford’s Vice President responsible for the Project, the fuel transfer system was very important in meeting the milestone. However, key to the success was the drive, determination, and proficiency of the operators, supporting craft and engineers. In a congratulatory statement to Project employees, Boyter noted that he had never been associated with a more technically challenging task, nor led a team more dedicated to getting the job done on time and safely.

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